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Ollin, Ros

The use of formative feedback in developing critical reflection in professional practice

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Workshop session: The use of formative feedback in developing critical reflection in professional practice:

Dr Ros Ollin University of Huddersfield

This session will focus on the place of formative assessment and feedback in developing critical reflection in professional practice.

Many professional programmes offered in HE– for example those related to teaching, health services, social work and management - are underpinned by notions of reflective practice. However, reflection can often be introspective, involved in uncovering one's own personal meanings, or evaluative, focusing on fairly superficial improvements in practice. In contrast, critical reflection includes consideration of the wider socio-political context to question one's own values, beliefs and assumptions (Sambrook and Stewart, 2008). Within a professional context, critical reflection is used to challenge deep-rooted assumptions with the aim of improving professional practice (Fook and Askeland, 2007).

Many professional courses use learner- centred reflective processes, such as reflective journals. However it is a mistake to assume that even mature students have developed the capacity to reflect (Sambrook and Stewart, 2008). Here the teacher is important in modelling their own processes of critical reflection to students (Brookfield, 1995). In addition, the teacher can help challenge taken-for- granted assumptions and deepen the students' capacity for reflection through critical dialogue. So what part can formative assessment play in that development?

In Certificate /PGCE courses for the Lifelong Learning sector, trainee teachers receive formative feedback following observed teaching, in which the focus is on asking questions to promote critical reflection, rather than providing answers. I will give examples of the questions used and share an example of student responses to the questions asked.

NB These questions are intended to be developmental and help the student engage critically with their own practice, but would only be used once a relationship of trust and respect had been built up with the student. They are intended to promote critical dialogue between tutor and student.

This approach could be used across a range of different professional programmes, not only in observations of practice, e.g. clinical encounters, but in formative feedback on written work.

This session will provide an opportunity for participants to share their own ideas and assessment practices for developing critical reflection in students.

References

- Brookfield, S. (1995) *Becoming a critically reflective teacher*, San Francisco: Jossey Bass.
Fook, J. and Askeland, G.A. (2007) Challenges of critical reflection: nothing ventured, nothing gained, *Social Work Education*, 26, 5, 520-533.
Sambrook, S. and Stewart, J. (2008) Developing critical reflection in professional focused doctorates: a facilitator's perspective, *Journal of European Industrial Training*, 32, 5, 359-373.

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Issues

Critiques suggest that reflective practice is often self-referenced, concentrated on the personal and individual experience, and at a technical, evaluative level rather than critically aware and emancipatory in nature?

1. Has assessment of 'reflective practice' (and indeed 'reflective practice' itself) become a tired and instrumental process?

2. Should we be trying to develop 'reflexivity'* rather than reflection?

* looking inwards to oneself as an individual, looking outward to the social, cultural, political, historical linguistic context and how it shapes ourselves and others.

3. How can we change the way we feedback to help students develop critical reflective practice through the use of questions as prompts?

Extracts from teaching observation feedback, showing examples of questions to prompt critical reflection included in my feedback following different teaching observations Given to students in later stages of the course. Questions to promote critical reflection are additional to more 'technical' points for development.

NB These questions are intended to be developmental and help the student engage critically with their own practice, but would only be used once a relationship of trust and respect had been built up with the student. They are intended to promote critical dialogue between tutor and student.

At the bottom of the observation feedback sheet students are asked to do the following: ***Please evaluate your session and consider all the points raised in this feedback. These are designed to help in your reflective practice and your own self assessment.***

1. Observation of a parenting session with parents under compulsory court orders

"You use the term 'love languages' as a focus of discussion with this group of parents. This comes from a series of parenting books developed by an American writer. The group seemed uncomfortable with this term. I'm interested in your views on this e.g. do you think it was because of the concepts behind the term, or was it the language used which signalled a different culture, with different forms of expression which might be alienating to your group? Is there an issue about the use of American therapeutic language with a parent group in Yorkshire?"

2. Observation of a community history group taught by a tutor who is dyslexic which includes a student just identified as dyslexic.

"- As a teacher you are in a position of power in relation to this student. What are the benefits of you being dyslexic in the support you can give this student? What might be the dangers in a strong emphasis on your particular experiences?

- What are your views on Ecclestone's work on therapeutic cultures in education? How do they tie in with your ideas on empowerment and 'learned helplessness'?"

3. Observation of an FE teacher, teaching joinery

"What are the different types of environmental impact connected with the information, materials and processes in your session today?"

How might they be made more sustainable?

4. Observation of a literacy teacher

"What do you think 'literacy' means?"

How does this compare with the 'literacy skills'; you are teaching for 'skills for life'?

What alternative views of literacy might be demonstrated in the skills used by your learners in their everyday life?

Explore what the term 'new literacies' means."

5. Observation of a community activist

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“How far are your underlying aims of empowering your learners supported by the teaching approaches you have used in this session?

What would you hope the social impact of this empowerment would be – for the learners? For society?”

Extract: Example of PGCE student’s reflection following question feedback on observed teaching to drug and alcohol counsellors.

Question: Are there any cultural issues that could have impacted on individuals in the group? Are there any cultural issues that you have left out in general (e.g. what kind of cultural perspective are you presenting from?)

On reflection, there is a cultural bias about the models we are presenting in that they are mostly from a western perspective and were developed mainly in the USA and Britain. We did include an alternative Eastern perspective in looking at a more holistic model of the development of problematic drug use. However, the counselling model (Cognitive-behavioural) that the students are learning, is based on these theories (despite the fact they are culturally biased). Later in the course we consider the limitations of the model. I must admit I did have concerns at one point in the session as one of the Muslim learners left the room at the point I was presenting a model called the moral weakness model which says alcohol is from god, but drunkenness from the devil. I know that the Muslim way of life forbids alcohol use and therefore the idea that alcohol is from God might not sit comfortably. I could have checked this out with the learner in question when she came back. Later I realised that this was the time she had told me she needed to leave the room to pray and we had agreed that she would just leave when it was time. On reflection I feel the uncomfortableness may have been more on my part and that the only way I could know for sure how she (or other people in the group) felt about the idea I was presenting was to ask them. I do not think I will change this input in the future, as it is part of the historical development of thinking around alcohol and drug problems. But I need to make sure that I flag up the western and Christian bias in some of the models before presenting them.

This student said she valued the questioning approach used in the feedback process:

I like the way the feedback is in terms of questions – this provides me with an opportunity to question and think, without the need to defend or justify my actions and decisions.

Dr Ros Ollin
School of Education and Professional Development,
University of Huddersfield
Huddersfield DH1 3DH
Email: r.e.ollin@hud.ac.uk